

## **Medical Clearance, Screening, and Liability**

Are people with disabilities more likely to be injured while exercising? The truth is there are risks for everyone. Most facilities will screen prospective members that may be at high risk for an “adverse event,” such as injury, heart attack, or stroke. If the staff are concerned about risks that may be experienced by a person with a disability, ask that person to discuss their abilities and limitations. In many cases, mere physical limitations are mistaken for serious disease or illness. It is important for anyone who has not been physically active, regardless of ability, to talk to his or her doctor before beginning an exercise program. Your established policy for filling out applications, health forms, and waivers needs to be the same for everyone.

## **Considerations for Different Disabilities**

Most people with disabilities know their abilities and limitations: which muscles work, how well each muscle functions; which movements cause pain, fatigue, or other symptoms; and which activities or exercises are feasible. More specific information can be obtained through reference books listed in Resources on page 36. In addition, consider consulting physical, occupational, or recreational therapists, adapted physical education teachers, or disability sports coaches.

The following list of issues and considerations are related to general disability categories. Disabilities are very individual in nature, and this list is merely designed as a place to start.

### **Physical Disabilities**

- There is a wide range of causes and degrees of involvement of physical disabilities. Consider each individual’s abilities and level of functioning.
- Do not remove crutches, walker, wheelchair, cane, braces, or prosthetic device (artificial limb) without permission.
- Wheelchair users may or may not be able to transfer to and from exercise equipment independently. Ask the individual what kind of assistance is preferred.
- Be aware that balance, postural stability, gripping ability, joint or muscle contractures, and spasticity may need to be taken into consideration when exercising. In most cases adaptations can be made.

### **Learning/Cognitive Disabilities**

- Many disabling conditions may not be apparent. These may involve cognitive or learning abilities and may affect understanding or communication. It is important to consider how information is presented. It may be necessary to break down directions into clear, easy-to-follow statements.
- Allow plenty of time for the new member to learn and master a task. Repetition is important for learning.